

Interview H0013 : with Lhatsun Labrang Chandzö [tib. lha btsun bla brang phyag mdzod], (India, 5 October 1992) : Part No. 2 of 3

The interviewee answers questions about the previous interview (H.0013.01). He also talks about how the Kazak fled from Xinjiang to Western Tibet and about the People's Association of 1952.

Now regarding who was working in the People's Association, there was Sera Mey Chandzö Thamchö Sonamla, then Tsa Drunyila who was the clerk/secretary of Sera Mey, then Drepung Loseling's Jayang Dawala, then from Gomang, there was Drubtho Rinpoche, then from Sera there was Chöndze Betru, then Kamekhang Chöndze and then from Kyire there was a leather worker.

Yes. His name was Tashila.

Q

Now he was a leather worker right?

A

Yes, but it was not like making shoes, etc. He made the cover of boxes and large leather bags for putting clothing [tib. khom 'bog] etc.

Q

How did the People's Association first begin and who started it? Last time it seemed that it was Tsa Drunyila.

A

What other questions are there?

Q

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Nothing more than that. You said some things I didn't quite understand. You know, at first someone has to say that it is now imperative that we start something, etc.

A

Yes, Yes. At first in 1950 [not clear]. Chandzö Thamchö Sonamla, Tsa Drunyila and we all did not like what the Chinese were up to. Even though the 17-Point Agreement did not state that so many Chinese were going to come, the kudrak and the government couldn't manage alone and the people started thinking that we just can't bear to hang around like that [doing nothing] so among us there was Tsa Drunyila, Chandzö Thamchö Sonamla and a few of us who got together and met in Jaralingka. We met for a day or two and then took a break. We could not do anything immediately. However [later] we gave the petition and thought that it was better to petition both the Tibetan and the Chinese together since the Chinese might dislike it and say it was not from the people. The Chinese alone could not be petitioned, since the [Tibetan] government might think something [if they excluded them]. So we thought it best to petition both. And so in that year, it was delayed [see previous interview and below].

Q

Before you had a meeting, you all must have met at someone's quarters and you must have had some talk. So I want to find out about that.

A

Yes, Yes. So anyway, the first year nothing took place. So I think it was in 1951 that I was going up to Tö and Tsa Drunyila was always in Lhasa. I arrived back from [Tö] on the 30th of the 11th month and according to our custom of gathering together when someone arrives from far away, that evening friends got together and Tsa Drunyila also came. That night the two of us got together. At that time, the Chinese had already come to Tö. So I was talking about the situation in Tö and talking about the way they came and what they did [in Tö]. We said that this is not at all acceptable and it would be good if we, the people, made a petition. Then we said that we should talk to Chandzö Thamchöla tomorrow and try and do something. So this meeting took place at my quarters. The next day we went to Chandzö Thamchöla and told him what the Chinese were up to in Tö and likewise here too. Leaving aside many matters, what the Chinese were doing was causing the price of foods to increase. All they thought of was to buy when plentiful and sell when scarce,

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and they raised the prices like hell and bought butter and grain at exorbitant prices. It was they who increased it. For example if grain costs 50 ngüsang, he [Chinese] would pay 3 dotse. The seller was not asking for that. Before they even asked for that, [the Chinese] would say how much they would pay. And they said these things with the idea of causing a famine. The same was true in the Tö area.

When they just arrived [in Tö] they fought with a small force of the Kazaks-about 30 odd people. They sent 200 soldiers to do that. They fought for about 5-6 days and then there was less than 100 soldiers left. They complained that they had nothing to eat and drink and were facing a lot of difficulties. Then they told the Ngari Garpön [tib. mnga' ris sgar dpon] [the top official in Western Tibet] that they needed food and even needed to slaughter 15 camels per day and things like that from the 6 dzong under the Garpön (Gardzong Drugdril [tib. sgar rdzong drug sbrel]). What they were saying was that they have come to help the miser and saying the miser should tell us [the Chinese] all kinds of things that the elites [tib. mtho rim] were doing to mistreat them. That's what they said from their mouths. They instigated the miser, but in reality they were demanding 800-1000 transport animals. Usually, the government did not have such a precedent for demanding so many animals. There was no way one could even speak and say that even if there were that many yaks, there were no "saddles" to use to tie loads on them. So then they tied the loads on the yaks without the saddles, like tying loads on donkeys. Then later the animals got sores on their backs. So they bullied [tib. btsan dbang] them a lot. So these were the things that I spoke about and said that we can't bear this. The first conversation took place at my quarters.

So then we went to see Chandzö Thamchöla and said that we better complete the work since the situation is such. So regarding all this we had a meeting and then we met again at Jaralingka. I doubt that we met there for more than a day. Then we met behind the Potala in the sandy area [tib. bye rag] and then we said that we can't always meet in an open space, so we rented a house in Shide. Now you know we spoke of the names of the people. We had made a name list and my name was below Jayang Dawala, but I did not mention it last night [time].

Q

No, you didn't mention your name.

A

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Yes, it was in that.

Q

Then you said something about you could not do things immediately since it was the New Year, gongsar [tib. dgung gsar] and then Mönlam was to follow.

A

Yes, Yes. Now we had a meeting, right?

Q

I didn't understand what you meant by gongsar?

A

It is the New Year.

Q

I see. Then since it was Mönlam, you could not do anything right?

A

The reason we had to do this was that it was an emergency situation. The Chinese were saying that they wanted to take over the armory, that the Tibetan army has to be joined with the People's Liberation Army. They were saying that one country can't have two armories and two armies and a lot of talk about putting flags on top of the Potala. So we were in the 12th month and it was time for the New Year, right? Then in the 1st month, day 4, the Mönlam begins and the monks of the 3 monasteries come to Lhasa and everybody is involved in religious practice. The rich people would give alms and make offerings and the poor ones would go for circumambulation and prostrate. So we thought that submitting the petition would interfere with this so we said that after the Mönlam and before the Tsongjö we will voice our concerns. To that effect we put up a letter [in town] [tib. yig skyur]. So we said that all of us Tibetans have concern that we want to convey to the Chinese and Tibetans together [tib. rgya bod zung sbrel]. This matter cannot be expressed now since the 12th month is the New Year, the 1st month is Mönlam Chemmo so this would not go well and so between the Mönlam and the Tsongjö, we will make our petition. So this was the letter posted. Concerning this, there was a song sung in Lhasa.

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Q

Yes, I wanted to ask you about that [the song].

A

It said, " Having firewood, we don't have time to burn bones, having the Dalai Lama, we don't have time to be liberated [tib. shing 'di gshags pa bzhag nas/, rus khog bud long mi 'dug/ ta lai bla ma bzhag nas, bcings 'gron gtong long mi 'dug] [since there was a Rinpoche visiting him and reading his prayers at this moment, I think may have changed the word, " dog shit" to "bone"]. Maybe the ones who first sang that song were the water carriers for the Mönlam Festival.

Q

So what is the meaning?

A

The meaning is this. The Chinese said that they were going to liberate Tibet. Usually, on the Lingkor road we don't burn old clothes and other odds and ends. After the Chinese came, they burned the carcasses of horses, dogs, donkeys and all kinds of dirty stuff. So this is what they were saying. What they were saying was that we are not going to leave the Dalai Lama and be liberated. This means why should they burn bones and carcasses when they have chopped wood. Anyway the meaning was they don't want to be liberated.

Q

Now regarding the petition, you said that there was another song.

A

Which song are you mentioning?

Q

You said that there was another song regarding the petition, but you did not remember it. Anyway if you remember it, or if you remember any song between 1950-59, please keep it in mind and write it down some place.

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A

Yes, I will think about it. Now what else is there?

Q

Now who made this song?

A

During Mönlam there was usually a new song. Since in Tibet we had no water taps, the Tsarong household had given large cauldrons for boiling water for tea. Lhasa women used to fetch water during this time and collect it. They were known as Mönlam water carriers (chulenpa [tib. chu len pa]). So they sang it. Now these songs became a kind of a prophesy. Some said that this was a kind of miracle [tib cho 'phrul] performed by the Shri Devi (Pelhamo [tib. dpal lha mo]). Since the main diety of Lhasa is Pelhamo, people believed that the songs are a kind of prophesy [from her].

Q

Now in politics, in the early days, it is said that those who were involved in politics wrote those songs. So was this song written by the organization?

A

I don't think it was the organization as such. Generally the origin of the songs cannot be pin-pointed. The reason being that in the early days organizations did not do all sorts of undisciplined things like posting letters. Because there was really no need to do so. The leaders were leaders who did things truthfully. Among the people, there were a few who stole and did things, but most obeyed the rules and those who enforced it, enforced it. And so there were no such things as posting letters and making a lot of talk. Later, after there was chaos [tib. zang ngi zang gni], then it seemed that these type of songs were sung and people wondered who made them and it couldn't be said that this person made it and sang it. These days we say this song was made and sung by so and so. We did not have that.

Q

The letter just stated that it is soon going to be Mönlam, etc., so after Mönlam and Tsongjö, we are going to make the petition. That's all.

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A

Yes, that's all. The reason being that he [the Chinese] were doing "things fast" [tib. mgyogs lcag] and it was because of this. Otherwise there was no need to say it. We could have made the petition at that time. But at that time we could not do the work right then, so we posted a letter. We did not do it secretly. We had 12 people and posted in important centers [around Lhasa]. There were police wooden houses so we posted it close to the walls near the police wooden houses and said that this is a petition regarding the concerns of all Tibetans and it can't be taken down [as was the usual rule] so see to it that they are not torn down. So they said, "Alright, Alright." If just common people told the police this, they would not going to listen.

Q

So you said that there were 12 people divided into two groups. Where did these people come from?

A

Now I can't remember the names, because the names of people in the organization I mentioned- they did not do the posting. They were working inside. So below them there was people. So during this time, the people with single-mindedness, came to join the People's Association, day and night, without discussion [by us]. They put their signatures, should I say, seals, saying, "I'm also joining, he is joining".

Q

I see, so when you first started you made a name list.

A

A name list was made. So they came saying, "I'm coming and he's coming". Mostly, they came at night. I alone had, over 50,000 people.

Q

Yes, last time you said that there were 50,000 people. Now these were people that belonged to different "regions" [tib. khungs]. But did you have the names of 50,000 people?

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A

Yes, I did have pretty much of it.

Q

Then that would cover so many pages!

A

Yes there were a lot. Later when the papers were burned, it took 6 days and nights.

Q

So wasn't it dangerous to keep so many lists of people?

A

Leave alone that. You know, I was telling you about the petition and the conversation that Tsa Drunyla and I had at my quarters? So when they held a hearing and when they asked who were the ones who first started [the organization], we said that it was Tsa Drunyla and myself. So we thought carefully in advance and we put our necks on the chopping block. Unlike these days where you can take a few days to do that. At that time, the Chinese were there and they just thought about being beheaded, so we had already decided to sacrifice everything.

Q

Now at the time that you were posting the letters, there were two groups of 12 people. By this time had a lot of the people already joined the People's Association?

A

Yes, a lot had come. As I mentioned, we rented a room at Shide. There we organized and sent people, but by then a lot of people had come.

Q

Now the posting of the letter was only at Lhasa, right? Not in any other towns?

A

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Yes, just Lhasa.

Q

Like I mentioned last time, in 1952, was there any connection with Kalimpong; [e.g.,] with Shakabpa and others?

A

No, there wasn't any at that time. They had sent some letters from there, but they did not send it to our organization. That was later.

Q

So that was to the later one? [later People's Association]

A

It was later, and at that time we were not working together.

Q

During this time, was there any work with the monasteries and the government, like with the 2 Sitsab?

A

Regarding this, the Chinese were asking if we were connected, and we said that we were not. So regarding such talks, there had to be some source, right? Without that we could not meet and couldn't talk with the Chinese. So we just couldn't stay without doing it? [not a straight answer, but seems to imply that there was some connection].

Q

Then in the 12th month, 10th day, you had a meeting. I think it was in Shide. This meeting was outside, right? Then later, a room was rented.

A

The first meeting was at Jaralingka, behind the Tse. The room renting was at Shide.

Q

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In the 12th month, at Shide; was it Gonsebshar?

A

The room was rented behind Shide. The first meeting was at Gonsebshar.

Q

Yes, isn't it. So it was somewhere outside?

A

This was also outside. Gonsebshar was in a field.

Q

Later a room was rented right?

A

Yes, that was at Shide.

Q

So when you rented it, you had to pay rent and so by then you had already started the organization? I mean, renting a place you have to pay money, right?

A

I must have stated it last time. At first we met at Gonsebshar and then in Shide. So one had to make fire and all that. So I agreed to meet all those expenses.

Q

After that, when you met, the Chinese found out about it. Then they told the Kashag, right? And the Kashag told the Nangtsesha, right? Then the Nangtsesha told the khangnyer, the house managers, right?.

A

Yes.

Q

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Did you say khangnyer? How many khangnyer were there in Lhasa?

A

Oh, there were so many. Every residence did not have a khangnyer, but every house owner had a khangnyer. Every house that is, say a two storied one that had a courtyard had a khangnyer since one has to tell something to renters, clean certain areas and important government matters when they call all the people living in that area to work as a tax [tib. du ba gnam gtong].

Q

I see. Now Nangtsesha told the khangnyer, right?

A

Nangtsesha asked the khangnyer to come and told them.

Q

So they told them and was any letter/document given?

A

No.

Q

Then who told your organization, the khangnyer?

A

Yes.

Q

So at that time, what did the khangnyer say? [Did he say] that you are not allowed to meet? Other than that.

A

They said that these days it seems that something called a People's Association is meeting and so you are not allowed to meet because the Chinese will be suspicious.

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Q

So this was before your letters were posted, right?

A

It was before we posted the letters. At that time, the Chinese were suspicious and they hauled a lot of sand and bought a lot of cloth from the Nepalese traders and made sand bags and made bunkers and barricaded the doors and windows.

Q

So when the khangnyer told you that, what did you say. What did you think at that time.

A

The khangnyer were delivering that message, however, as I stated before, we had already fully decided to go through with it and the room was rented. The khangnyer could not however point to one person and say that you are not allowed to do this, right? So we said - alright, alright. After we spoke with the khangnyer, we posted the letter saying that in the 2nd month we are going to make the petition. Now, [it/we] really came out/forth.

Q

So during this time the People's Association were meeting only in Lhasa and not at other locales, right?

A

No, not specifically. But they came from far away. They were coming to us. However, in various localities [tib. sa gnas] there were very prominent people [tib. mi drag pa] who made a list - each had their own name list.

Q

Later, it was probably from our government's side, but they said that they were going to do an investigation. Anyway, you have mentioned quite a lot of things, but one thing you said; it seems that you first agreed to go to the Kashag, right?

A

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Yes.

Q

So did the Chinese also agree to come to the Kashag.

A

Well it was something like that.

Q

Who were you talking with when it was said that you have to go to the Kashag and the Chinese were going to come to the Kashag?

A

We requested the Kashag to accept our petition. And since the petition concerned both Chinese and Tibetans, the Chinese were sort of supposed to come to the Kashag. We thought that they were coming and so we went to the Kashag. Since we went to the Kashag and since the Chinese did not come, the Kashag went to the Chinese leader. I don't remember his name now. Anyway, it was in the old Sandutsang House where the petition was handed over.

Q

So from the Kashag you went to Sandutsang. Was it a Chinese office?

A

The Chinese leader stayed there.

Q

Was it Zhang Jingwu?

A

Could be.

Q

Was it Zhang Jingwu? Tan Guansan?

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A

May have been Zhang Jingwu or Tan Guansan. I can't tell you for sure.

Q

So you thought that when you gave the petition at the Kashag the Chinese were sort of supposed to come?

A

Whether the Chinese were going to come to the Kashag or the Kashag was going to take our petition to the Chinese, we gave the petition at the Kashag. So Kashag did not accept it and asked us to wait. We waited for quite a long time. Then the Kashag told us to come there and we handed it there.

Q

Were the Chinese there?

A

Yes.

Q

Did the Kashag inform them that they were coming?

A

I don't know whether they did or not. Since the Kashag went there, I can't tell you anything specific on that.

Q

So you did not actually go there?

A

Yes. The Kashag went there first, and then we went after that.

Q

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I see. And how many were there who presented the petition?

A

About 10 odd people. Tsa Drunyila, I think Thamchö Sonamla was there, but I can't recall and we were there.

Q

Yes, it is somewhere here - you said that about 16 people went [to the Kashag]. This was in the Tsuklagang, right?

A

Yes.

Q

When you went to the office, you mentioned some names like Sambo, etc.

A

This is where the investigation took place.

Q

Yes. Then you said that there were photos taken and this was in Sandutsang.

A

Yes.

Q

The photos were taken by the Chinese?

A

Yes.

Q

And then they looked for marks, right?

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A

Yes, Yes. Like birthmarks and gold teeth. They noted these down.

Q

I want to ask you about this. You said that in the ütsang Organization [history], they wrote something about the People's Association of the Water-Dragon Year. Who wrote that?

A

This was written during the 5th or 4th meeting of the Central Tibetan Organization (ütsang tsokpa). I was not there.

Q

Have you seen it?

A

Yes, a little bit. But I didn't get the time to read it.

Q

What I was wondering was how detailed was it.

A

I got the feeling that what they wrote and what we did somehow was not quite [the same]. I sort of got the feeling that it was written not by those who worked in it, but by those who did not. On the one hand, they may have done that, on the other, they may have written according to the way they thought.

Q

Now I don't know when it was, but there was an occasion when it was said that from nightfall to dawn one could not go around for the circumambulation path (Lingkor) and other places.

A

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We handed the petition on the 6th day of the 2nd month, right? Around dawn on the 6th, you know. the Nangtshesha has the Korchagpa, right. The Korchagpa brought the message. They went not to each door, but knocked on the gates of larger compounds and smaller households and said that from tomorrow on, one cannot go for the Lingkor circumambulation and that before dawn and after sunset [can't go out] since the Chinese were going to shoot.

Q

So this was for only one day, right?

A

The conversation took place on the night of the 6th. The next day was the 7th. So they were not saying that only the 7th they were going to shoot. Anyway, it was sort of going to go on for a while until it was settled. But there was no talk about shooting until it was settled. Anyway, they had to shoot until it was settled.

Q

So they were saying that nobody was allowed to go about?

A

Yes, they said that no one is allowed to go about after sunset and before dawn, Can't go around the Lingkor. If one did, then they said that they were going to shoot.

Q

If you did then they would shoot?

A

Yes.

Q

Now how long did this go on?

A

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It was in force until the matter was about over. For example, there was the instigation and we gave the reasons for it and then they had to passed the verdict.

Q

In terms of duration, how long was it?

A

[Let me see] The 2nd month, and I think it was still there in the 3rd month.

Q

About a month?

A

Probably over a month.

Q

So for a month people were not allowed to go for the Lingkor, right?

A

The investigation did not take that long, but regarding passing the verdict it must have taken sometime.

Q

So for about a month there were no people going about?

A

No.

Q

From sunset to before the sunrise, right?.

A

It was till around dawn.

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Q

So this stayed for about a month?

A

it was there until the verdict was passed.

Q

The one who brought the message was the Korchagpa, right?

A

Yes.

Q

So during this time the way the message moved was that the Chinese told the Kashag, right?

A

The Chinese told the Kashag. The Kashag told the Nangtsesha and then it went to the Korchagpa.

Q

Likewise, when the investigation was all done and they asked you to come, this was also the government officials?

A

Yes, how?

Q

Yes, should one say the verdict When the judgement was given saying that you can't do this, etc; this was all said by our government officials, right?

A

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Yes. When the investigation was done, there was Kungö Shasur, Trenthong Khenjung, Sambo and then there were two or three Chinese officers who I don't remember, and two interpreters. What was told to us was said by our officials.

Q

During this time how large was this organization of the People's Association.

A

It was very large.

Q

You said that you had 50,000 members. Now did you have members from all the various dzong.

A

Yes, from all over the place. During this time I was at Tö Ngari as the Acting Dzongpön of Dapa Dzong. Then I was a Acting Tax Collector of Tsanda Tsashö. Then, likewise, in the northern area Changrig [tib. byang rigs]. At Changrig I had old family connections. So to places like this I specially send people to get their name lists. So in that way, that is how I got so many people.

Q

So you have a list of names.

A

Yes.

Q

That's amazing.

A

Now some were this way. In various groups [tib. shog kha] each had their own chiefs [tib, dpon po] and they through a person they a letter saying how many households and household members there were with the household names and the seals.

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Q

For example, if we were to consider the areas under you, then which areas were they?

A

It was 6 to 7 days past Mount Kailash. The Dapa dzong, Ngari Gar, and Tsabrang [tib. rtsa hreng] Dzong were all under Tsanda Tsashö. So the people under that were there. So it was not a situation where we paid money and sent people, but one where they came forward and said that there were so many people.

Q

So you must have spoken with them.

A

We did have talks, [and they said] that there were such a number of people and so they were voluntarily bringing it [the list of names].